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CORRESPONDENCE

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE DIAGRAM

Editor of the School Review.

In the report of the proceedings of the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club in the February number of the SCHOOL REVIEW my own discussion of the paper upon The Psychology of the Diagram is limited to a single sentence. I requested that this brief report be given in the expectation that the paper would appear in full in the REVIEW and that I should then have an opportunity to discuss it and the remarks made upon it somewhat at length. As it is, this brief letter must suffice.

We are told that the diagram is faulty because it does not represent the psychological genesis of the sentence from a single undifferentiated word like the interjection. But what, pray, has English grammar, as taught in the public schools, to do with this genesis of the sentence? "I have cut my finger with my knife." Such a sentence, it is said, is an outgrowth psychologically of a sensation of pain which expressed itself at first in a simple exclamation. Very well, if that be so, it may be an interesting fact to the student of the origin of language, but what has it to do with the teaching of grammar in the seventh and eighth grades or in the ordinary high school?

If we are to get any disciplinary value from the study of grammar, any real knowledge of syntax; indeed, if we are to teach grammar at all, it must be done through analysis. We must consider the sentence as a living product, as an organism made up of a subject and its modifiers and a predicate verb and its modifiers. We must take the organism apart and we must put it together again. In fact, if we teach grammar pedagogically, we shall make the sentence our point of departure.

We shall develop from it the idea of noun, pronoun, inflection, agreement, word, phrase, clause, etc. Of course, analysis may be overdone, but as a method it is absolutely indispensable to any sound progress whatsoever. But how about the "genesis of the sentence psychologically from a single undifferentiated word?" How about

"involving the false conception of the nature of a sentence, the conception that it is a machine like a watch, for instance, to be taken to pieces and put together again in order to learn its structure?" The entire argument of our philosophic objectors to the diagram holds its validity just as truly against oral analysis as it does against the diagram, and we should have been somewhat relieved if they had condescended to notice method long enough to tell us *how* they would teach grammar. Have they some scheme by which they purpose to inject the psychologic genesis of the sentence into the minds of our boys and girls in the public schools; or, if some diagram is useful, as they admit, how will they project some retinal image of this interesting origin of the sentence into the field of external vision? We are anxious about it.

Now the fact of the matter is that the diagram as an instrument or aid in teaching grammar in the public schools has both its advantages and its disadvantages. Had we space at our disposal, we should be glad to discuss these somewhat in detail. Our point, however, is that the "conservative thinking" which our critic calls for demands a judicial consideration of both the advantages and the disadvantages, not a prejudiced emphasis of the disadvantages alone, not the scant courtesy of declaring that the "systems of diagramming now in vogue rest upon superficial and arbitrary knowledge, and that the use made of them smacks very generally of charlatanism!"

In conclusion we wish to notice one or two statements of our critic: "There are a thousand variations that no system yet devised can exhibit," he says; "the diagram as a method of recitation or examination must remain hopelessly deficient." The first statement is an exaggeration. There are a few constructions which we have not been able to find symbols for in any system of diagram; but they are few in number, and we are no more disturbed by them than we are by unparseable idioms or constructions whose history is difficult to trace. We do not discard all parsing and analysis on account of these idioms and constructions. The second statement is a mistake, and is made without the writer ever having studied the system of diagram in detail; not a commendable *method*, certainly of settling a pedagogic problem.

Concerning the advantages of the diagram, a final statement or two, which space will not permit us to elaborate. (1) The diagram does, in a general way, fairly well represent the grammatical structure of the English sentence. (2) With young pupils, the understanding of

grammatical relations in English is especially difficult because of our lack of inflections; in this respect, the diagram, appealing to the eye, is a sort of substitute for the inflections of foreign languages. This is its chief psychologic value, rendered in no respect invalid because it does not portray the historical development of the sentence. Basing our opinion upon some twenty years of observation and experience, we reiterate the statement of Superintendent Perry of Ann Arbor, that "It is not too much to say that grammar as a productive study has been made possible in the seventh and eighth grades by the diagram." (3) In high schools, and in normal schools with large classes, the diagram is an indispensable aid in the rapid conduct of recitation; and to the teacher overburdened with much manuscript it is a sort of god-send as a system of stenography.

That we may not seem to have overlooked the disadvantages, which we have not space to discuss, allow us, as a final word, to say that before the County Commissioners of the state, as well as the Schoolmasters' Club, we frankly admitted that owing to the abuses of the diagram arising from faulty teaching, it is a fair question whether as an instrument of instruction it has not done quite as much harm as good in the public schools of the state. We are convinced, however, that the disadvantages are not inherent in the system itself, but that they are due rather to abuses which it is the duty of sound pedagogy to correct.

Very truly yours,

F. A. BARBOUR

MICHIGAN STATE NORMAL SCHOOL

CHANGE IN ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS TO VASSAR COLLEGE

[We take pleasure in calling attention to an important step that has just been taken by Vassar College, and cannot refrain from printing President Taylor's note accompanying the statement because the spirit it shows of appreciation of school problems will be grateful to all secondary teachers. —ED. SCHOOL REVIEW.]

Editor of the School Review.

May I send you a statement of what we have agreed to accept in place of the third language which is required for admission here? We have been strongly impressed by Mr. Nightingale's direct words to our alumnæ at our meeting in Chicago and by the article in the SCHOOL REVIEW, and we have decided to go to this